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# AMERICA'S DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

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Urgent National Priority and Opportunity: Digital Upskilling



Federal Communications Commission



Communications Equity and Diversity Council  
Innovation and Access Working Group  
Digital Skills Gap Workstream

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# I. INTRODUCTION

## America’s Digital Transformation: Digital Upskilling as an Urgent U.S. National Priority and Opportunity

America stands today on the precipice of a once-in-a-generation opportunity to close the digital divide. Unprecedented federal infrastructure investment – including \$65 billion for broadband access, development, and upskilling — offers the prospect of a nation in which every individual and community are full participants in a digital economy that can depend, with confidence, upon the robust and skilled workforce it needs to compete in a global environment. As noted by Former Acting FCC Chairwoman, Mignon Clyburn, in her keynote speech to the *Digital Skills Gap Symposium and Town Hall* hosted by the FCC’s Media Bureau and the Communications Equity and Diversity Council (CEDC) in September of 2022, “How can every American acquire the knowledge and skills that would grant them a non-negotiable inalienable right to Digital Citizenship?”<sup>1</sup>

The digital and internet revolution advanced at an unprecedented pace, outpacing the ability of our institutions and systems to keep up. As a result, the gap between employer needs and employee capabilities has never been wider, with America now ranked 29th in digital skills training and adoption<sup>2</sup>. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this problem, revealing chronic deficiencies in digital skills training and adoption and highlighting the need to bridge the digital divide.

However, this crisis also presents an opportunity for America to uplift millions of citizens who are trapped in the digital divide and to fill the talent gap where employers everywhere are desperate for digitally trained middle-skilled workers. The Biden administration has seized the moment, with tens of billions in funding earmarked for the

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<sup>1</sup> See, CEDC September 22, 2022 Digital Skills Gap Symposium and Town Hall (videostream, agenda, participant bios are available at <https://www.fcc.gov/news-events/events/2022/09/digital-skills-gap-symposium-town-hall>).

<sup>2</sup> Datanami (2022). *Coursea Report Ranks Global Skills in Business, Tech, and Data Science* (Online) Available at: <https://www.datanami.com/2022/06/16/coursea-report-ranks-global-skills-in-business-tech-and-data-science/> (Date accessed: 5/20/23).

three legs of the digital divide stool: Affordability, Connectivity, and Digital Skills Training.

In 2021 with this opportunity as part of the vision, FCC Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel, announced that the Federal Communications Commission (Commission) would re-charter the Advisory Committee on Diversity and Digital Empowerment (ACDDE) under a new name – the Communications Equity and Diversity Council (CEDC). The CEDC’s mission expanded from its initial concentration on the media ecosystem to review more broadly critical diversity and equity issues across the tech sector. The CEDC’s Innovation and Access Workstream #3 Group (I&A Digital Skills Gap Workstream) has, for more than 18 months, focused its attention on the critical barriers to and best practices for effective and inclusive digital upskilling in all communities. Some of the critical activities conducted by the I&A Digital Skills Gap Workstream include:

- Hosting a Digital Skills Symposium and Town Hall Meeting that brought together stakeholders from around the country to examine the issues and challenges that states and localities face in addressing the need for greater adoption of digital skills training. The symposium also provided attendees with information on what federal and state government entities, non-profit sectors, community-based organizations, and other diverse stakeholders are doing to close the digital divide and advance digital literacy for all Americans.
- Conducted follow-up meetings with subject matter experts after the symposium to gather additional insights and updates following the release of State Digital Equity Planning Grants and other developments.
- Meeting regularly (mostly weekly) to discuss new developments and strategies for upskilling.
- Developed an interim and final report on findings, conclusions, and recommendations from the group’s activities.

From our work throughout 2021-2023, one conclusion of the I&A Digital Skills Gap Workstream is that Digital Skills Gap learning and training must be a North Star of the forthcoming state digital equity/broadband plans for them to be successful. A recent report by the National Skills Coalition (NSC) reveals overwhelming demand for digital

skills in the labor market, with 92 percent of all job ads requiring digital skills.<sup>3</sup> Yet nearly one-third of U.S. workers do not have foundational digital skills, and workers of color are disproportionately affected due to structural inequities.<sup>4</sup> In addition, a World Economic Forum/PwC report estimates that upskilling workers in digital skills could boost the world's Gross Domestic Product by over \$6 trillion dollars by the end of this decade.<sup>5</sup>

As funding becomes available, equity and diversity must be the lens through which working models, systems, and best practices are developed, shared, and deployed by states, tribal organizations, and territories. Our goal as a group is to help move the needle, breaking down barriers and changing the trajectory of millions of lives and our country.

This report summarizes the work of our group, identifying the critical issues of this transition and providing concise focal points for success. The success of this transformation is absolutely linked to our overall competitiveness as a country, as well as our homeland security. Failure to act proactively and intentionally could lead to lost opportunities, diminished economic power, and greater divides along traditional racial, ethnic, and socio-economic lines.

## **I&A WG #3 Recommendations:**

1. Share Report with NTIA and other federal government/agency stakeholders.
2. Create a formalized “National Digital Skills Strategy:”
  - a. Consider re-chartering the CEDC (or a task force/committee) to focus on formalizing this Plan (with a Plan or interim report delivered no later than March 1, 2024). Requesting that I&A group continue the work, and that some of the same members be involved – the outputs would be up to that

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<sup>3</sup> National Skills Coalition. (2023). *Closing the Digital Skill Divide* (Online).

Available at: <https://nationalskillscoalition.org/resource/publications/closing-the-digital-skill-divide/> (Date accessed: 4/25/23).

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> World Economic Forum (2021). *Upskilling for Shared Prosperity* (Online).

Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/upskilling-for-shared-prosperity/> (Date accessed: 4/25/23).

group - Invite representatives from key agencies, local/state organizations, and trade groups, but some recommendations could include:

- i. Create CEDC taskforce/working group – include representatives from other agencies/organizations;\*
- ii. Overarching mission follows the recommendations in WS#3 final report;
- iii. Help create a framework that can be shared;
- iv. Asset mapping;
- v. Seek additional comments on a potential National Digital Upskilling Plan as a further notice to the Digital Discrimination NPRM;
- vi. Aggregate best practices from state equity plans into National Digital Skills Strategy into final recommendations;
- vii. Determine metrics and measurement recommendations / goals for Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) and Digital Equity Act (DEA) funding; and
- viii. Ensure that providers are familiar with the Plan, its goals and create ways they can support the overall Digital Upskilling effort.

3. FCC should adopt digital upskilling strategies that are effective in the following areas:
  - a. Meet people where they are and build trust in the community;
  - b. Utilizes traditional media to reach underrepresented groups;
  - c. Overcome systemic barriers & emphasize sustainability through collaboration; and
  - d. Measure outcomes & establish metrics.

### **Recommended Focus for the Commission**

#### Bridging the Digital Divide:

1. Highlight Critical Importance of Trusted Partnerships & Positive Lessons Learned from ACP.
  - a. Successes in ACP Outreach could be implemented for Digital Upskilling.
2. Universal Concepts:
  - a. Meet people where they are and build trust in the Community;

- b. Utilize traditional media to reach underrepresented groups;
- c. Overcome systemic barriers and emphasize sustainability through collaboration; and
- d. Measure outcomes and establish metrics.

*\* As an example, in the Jobs Skills and Training working group of the FCC's Broadband Deployment Advisory Committee (BDAC) final report in 2020, they recommended the creation of an interagency committee to address many of the workforce related issues that the working group highlighted. The Telecommunications Interagency Working Group was chartered in January of 2022 with the objective of presenting a recommendations report to Congress, on the state of the Broadband Workforce, by January 2023.*

## II. WHAT WE FOUND

Universal digital upskilling is an educational, cultural, and economic imperative. According to the NSC, "This demand is robust across all industries, and small businesses are just as likely as their larger peers to seek workers with technology skills."<sup>6</sup>

Success depends upon America's ability to act intentionally and proactively; inaction will lead to lost opportunities, diminished economic power, and the potential of greater divides along traditional racial, ethnic, and socio-economic lines.

Today, we enjoy a historic opportunity for investment at a scope and scale that could level the playing field for millions of American families and workers who have been excluded for decades from the opportunities of the digital economy. Leveraging that opportunity will demand the collective efforts of a diverse and inclusive coalition of individuals and organizations in communities across the country.

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<sup>6</sup> National Skills Coalition (2023). *Closing the Digital Skill Divide* (Online). Available at: <https://nationalskillscoalition.org/resource/publications/closing-the-digital-skill-divide/> (Date accessed: 4/25/23).

Their efforts must build upon the work already accomplished by the nonprofits, anchor institutions, community leaders, advocates, and resident experts who have been immersed in this work for decades. It will depend upon an unwavering commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in the planning offices in every state, all of which have received funding to develop Digital Equity plans for submission to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) in the fourth quarter of this year. Those plans, according to the NTIA, will identify best practices to ensure that “this bold investment is targeted to those who need it most.”<sup>7</sup>

This final I&A Digital Skills Gap Workstream report shares what we have learned through our research, interviews, conversations, and benchmarking. It is our intention and hope that this report is both an inspirational confirmation of the critical nature of our shared purpose, as well as an efficient and practical guide to best practices and essential insights for those treading new or unmapped ground. The remainder of the report is organized around key takeaways:

- Meet people where they are.
- Be of the community. Don’t parachute in.
- Build for sustainability.
- Collaborate and partner.
- Measure, measure, measure (Section Two)

Ten years hence, success will mean that we moved the needle. It will mean we have eradicated the barriers that have, for generations, impeded millions from realizing their full potential. We will have eliminated institutional silos and established longstanding partnerships for the common good. We will see where we have been because we will have mapped measurable and lasting improvements as they occurred and evolved. Most important, it means we will have impacted the trajectory of millions of lives and thousands of communities, creating a more diverse, equitable and inclusive nation.

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<sup>7</sup> National Telecommunications and Information Administration (2023). *NTIA’s Role in Implementing the Broadband Provisions of the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* (Online) Available at: <https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/news/latest-news/ntias-role-implementing-broadband-provisions-2021-infrastructure-investment-and> (Date accessed: 5/20/23).

## **A. Meeting People Where They Are: Overview**

To realize its ambition of global leadership in a digital economy, the United States must be prepared to address a bold and aspirational question: How can we offer every American the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills they need to compete and thrive in today's digital economy and workforce?

The answer is as complex as the nation itself: While some needs – such as equipment and funding – may be universal, barriers to access and opportunity are shaped by influences that include geographies, social narratives, racial and ethnic identities, faith traditions, located histories, and embedded power relations, among others. Those variables, in turn, produce a universe of challenges and limitations that impact the lived experiences of those aspiring to participate more fully in the digital economy.

It is the obligation and responsibility of funders, advocates, educators, and support systems to meet people where they are, and to identify, and address, the needs of those whose successful participation they seek. Such an approach requires the patience, respect, and persistence to understand the realities and experiences of people financially, mentally, spiritually, and physically.

The rush to train is so overwhelming sometimes the cultural component gets lost. In order to effectively address central issues faced in diverse communities, cultural considerations should be integrated into policies and systems across various environments. This can help mobilize communities toward positive change. Developing a network of local trusted partners and having community institutions involved is paramount for being able to meet communities where they are, as it is the only way to really create an intimate and solid understanding about their unique situations and needs. Digital equity work is really a local exercise.

Local, regional, and state governments are working across the country to develop and adopt digital skills training plans, leveraging local communities and systems to contribute to the professional development and upskilling of their citizenry. Experts and advocates who participated in the I&A Digital Skills Gap Workstream's public presentations and small-group conversations offered insights and ideas about best

practices and critical considerations, informed by their own observations, experiences and commitments:

## 1. Meeting People Where They Are.

1) **Meeting people where they are is a crucial aspect of addressing the needs of greater adoption of digital skills:** It involves understanding the unique challenges and barriers faced by individuals and communities in accessing technology and digital resources. This approach requires engaging with people in their own communities and peer-to-peer networks, as well as collaborating with state and federal agencies and community coalitions that have been doing digital inclusion work. Doing so maximizes the likelihood that digital inclusion efforts are tailored to the specific needs of each community and can be scaled effectively over time.

2) **Build trust and establish relationships with the community:** By working with local organizations and community leaders, digital inclusion efforts can be integrated into the fabric of the community, increasing the likelihood that they will be adopted and sustained over time.

States need to identify the in-community outlets, even if local anchor institutions and local leaders are not doing digital work, that have a community-based location and the trust of the community, which makes them ideal partners for digital skills training and inclusion resources. Additionally, by engaging with individuals in their own peer-to-peer networks, it is possible to tap into existing relationships and networks of trust, which can help to amplify the impact of digital inclusion efforts.

3) **As highlighted in the February 2023 CEDC Media Ownership Diversity Symposium there needs to be a priority and focus on using minority-owned broadcasters, newspapers and other media to get out the message regarding digital skills training, job and supplier diversity opportunities into both relevant communities and the**

**public at large.**<sup>8</sup> In general, all stakeholders must engage the trusted, community-level voices of small and diverse suppliers and minority owned media into the game.

4) ***Using traditional media methods when engaging in outreach efforts is important to raising awareness about digital skills programs:***

These include advertising in local community newspapers, subway stations, and distributing printed materials at local businesses and community organizations. Phone banking and canvassing door-to-door have also proven successful in fostering conversations in the community with the goal of raising awareness.

5) ***Map the gaps:*** It is necessary to identify the gaps, locally, regionally, and nationally. One strategy is to convene various interagency committees to exchange notes and to align vision and mission. Another is to expand the coalition of employers focused on digital equity and empower them to play an active role in the development and execution of the digital plan. By working with local community groups, government agencies, and the private sector to reach these communities, every participant is better situated to identify specific barriers that may be preventing individuals and communities from accessing technology and digital resources. This, in turn, offers insights to identify best practices and strategies that have been successful. Ultimately, meeting people where they are is about ensuring that digital inclusion efforts are grounded in the needs and realities of the communities they serve, and that they are designed to be both impactful and sustainable over time.

6) ***Finally, meeting people where they are can help identify and address systemic barriers to digital inclusion:***

Immigrant communities or limited English proficiency communities, senior citizens, low-income households, communities of color, people with disabilities, and tribal communities, among others, face some of the greatest barriers to full digital inclusion. The Internet is an incredible resource so long as you have the skills and the tools to use it. *Example: Philadelphia's Digital*

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<sup>8</sup> See CEDC Media Ownership Diversity Symposium, February 7, 2023 (<https://www.fcc.gov/news-events/events/2023/02/media-ownership-diversity-symposium>).

Navigator network launched during the pandemic to reach limited English proficiency communities.<sup>9</sup>

## 2. **Be of the community. Don't parachute in.**

- 1) ***Listen and learn, rather than parachuting in and telling a community what to do.*** In order to address issues regarding digital equity and upskilling within a community, it's essential to have a thorough understanding of their specific needs and challenges. A "one-size-fits-all" approach is unlikely to be effective. Therefore, programs like the BEAD and Digital Equity Programs mandate that state-level entities conduct needs assessments to identify barriers to digital equity and take inventory of available programs. This enables informed strategies that can truly make a difference within the community.
- 2) ***The importance of engaging local community organizations cannot be overemphasized.*** These organizations – which include libraries, adult education programs, churches and other places of worship, schools, unions, health care agencies, job centers, and social-service groups – have a deep understanding of the specific needs and challenges faced by the communities they serve. They have credibility with community members and can help spread awareness about digital inclusion programs and initiatives, encouraging participation and increasing the overall impact of the outreach efforts. As an example, survey data shows that communities with public libraries or other anchor institutions experience higher Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) enrollment than places without them.<sup>10</sup>
- 3) ***Identify and utilize small and diverse entrepreneurs as a core prerequisite of the infrastructure being built out associated with Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD) Program, Digital Equity Programs, and other funding sources. As noted in the CEDC 2022 Recommendations and Best Practices to Prevent Digital***

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<sup>9</sup> City of Philadelphia Digital Navigator Program - <https://www.phila.gov/services/education-learning/get-help-with-technology/get-help-from-a-digital-navigator/> (Accessed May 20, 2023).

<sup>10</sup> FCC Affordable Connectivity Program: <https://www.fcc.gov/acp>, (Federal Communications Commission website).

*Discrimination and Promote Digital Equity Report*, “Diversity and Inclusion is a core principle and foundational to the telecommunication industry’s obligation to break down long-standing and well-known barriers to entry for diverse suppliers in the supply chain ecosystem.”<sup>11</sup>

- 4) *Develop and communicate compassion about people’s situations.* To be successful in Broward County, Florida, for example, it is necessary to recognize and understand that the community is home to asylum seekers and refugees from around the world. More than 40 languages are spoken. For many, the need for shelter and food rank more highly than digital training, so even people who sign up for classes may not ultimately attend. It is an extra level of flexibility that is necessary going into these processes.<sup>12</sup>

### **3. Build for sustainability.**

- 1) *Track existing programs to ensure that those that are working are sustainable after funding runs out.* Questions to ask include is the program reaching the intended target audience? Determine Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) such as median household income, employment, as well as broadband adoption data which includes number of households with a computer and with broadband internet subscription and track changes. Currently, states are required to create an inventory of digital inclusion services as part of their DE plan development. Organizations should be able to keep track of funded programs and their KPIs.
- 2) *Hold listening sessions and leverage partners and local workforce boards in rural areas to understand what is in place and what resources can be built out.*
- 3) *Develop partnerships with for-profit businesses, anchor institutions and community leaders on how to embed digital literacy and inclusion into and with those trusted resources.*
- 4) *Prototype and assess the interventions already in place to scale the most effective models with implementation dollars.*

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<sup>11</sup> *Recommendations and Best Practices to Prevent Digital Discrimination and Promote Digital Equity* source: The Federal Communications Commission Communications Equity and Diversity Council (CEDC), November 7, 2022 (available at <https://www.fcc.gov/sites/default/files/cedc-digital-discrimination-report-110722.pdf>).

<sup>12</sup> FCC Official Transcript, *Digital Skills Gap Symposium and Town Hall 2022*, page 94.

- 5) *Recognize that technology will continue to change, people will continue to need retraining and upskilling, so let us figure out how to set up systems so that this ongoing upskilling will move forward. Often, those systems come from partnerships, and we must find resources in places we may not have looked before to keep the work going.*

#### **4. Collaborate and partner.**

- 1) *Seek partners who can participate in building capacity, the knowledge base and enough individuals interested in participating in the emerging opportunities.*
- 2) *Create shared playbooks to reach the greatest number of people. Breaking down silos and fostering collaboration are probably two of the most challenging objectives ahead. Cross-agency collaboration is paramount and not an easy task.*
- 3) *“Just 0.05% of overall giving from large US foundations between 2010-2019 went to efforts to close the digital divide.”<sup>13</sup> There is an urgent need to identify corporate and foundation partners who can provide sustaining funding to help establish a national network of service providers.*
- 4) *Create coalitions of community groups and local employers, libraries, advocates, and nonprofits and take the upskilling show on the road to spread the word across communities about available programs and opportunities.*
- 5) *Develop partnerships to expand reach and to share responsibility for outcomes. By bringing partners in to help, that makes everybody take ownership. That is what we’re looking at: Who else can help? Who else wants to close the digital divide across the United States?*

## **B. How to Reward and Incentivize**

Are we, and, if so, how are we willing to reward and incentivize digital skills training? Would the private sector, and hence corporate employers, higher education institutions, foundations, and other important stakeholders, be more willing to help

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<sup>13</sup> Connect Humanity (2022). *Funding to bridge the digital divide: U.S. philanthropic giving to digital equity causes.* (Online).

advance this cause if there were any federal and/or local incentives for them to embed digital skills training, inclusion resources, and workforce results in what they do? The key to achieving digital equity lies in the network formed through community-based work. It is not just about providing access to broadband connectivity and devices, but also about ensuring people have the knowledge and skills to use them effectively. Our report includes several appendices that offer multiple overviews of corporate digital equity programs.

## **C. Data, Accountability and Sustainability in Digital Upskilling**

Investments in digital upskilling initiatives are key to socioeconomic development and digital transformation. In the workforce, for example, there are huge advantages for companies that digitally upskill their staff. The World Economic Forum/PwC study noted earlier found that businesses with the most advanced upskilling programs saw three times the improvement in innovation.<sup>14</sup> In Section 1 of this report, we saw how stakeholders can work together and the important role they play in digital upskilling. But what can be done to relieve the burden placed on citizens who try to receive, benefit, access and programs such as ACP? And even when stakeholders are held accountable, we need to make sure initiatives are sustainable and replicable.

## **D. Upholding Accountability in Digital Upskilling**

Digital upskilling requires trust by the community that the processes in place to receive government benefit programs are efficient and not burdensome. Citizens and consumers need to know that they can depend on other stakeholders to eliminate complex benefit access requirements. One key challenge is the multi-step processes faced by many households who try to sign up for FCC's Affordable Connectivity Program<sup>15</sup> and significant time delays to get their services turned on.<sup>16</sup> How often does

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<sup>14</sup> World Economic Forum (2021). *Upskilling for Shared Prosperity* (Online).

Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/upskilling-for-shared-prosperity/> (Date accessed: 4/25/23).

<sup>15</sup> *FCC Affordable Connectivity Program*: <https://www.fcc.gov/acp>, (Federal Communications Commission website).

<sup>16</sup> Updater (2022) *A Guide to the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)*. (Online) Available at: <https://updater.com/guides/affordable-connectivity-program> (Date accessed: 5/20/23).

a program applicant have time to sit on the phone with a service provider for up to one hour? A study by John Horrigan and the Benton Institute released in March of 2023 indicated that digital skill level was a predictor of successful sign ups of ACP. It also showed that lack of awareness was a primary barrier to ACP participation. Among those who were not aware of the ACP, over two thirds (68%) indicated they would be likely to apply if given more information or if they knew that they qualified - trust also emerged as an issue in this study.<sup>17</sup> Stakeholders who receive DEA and/or digital upskilling-related grant funding should be evaluated for their effectiveness in delivering digital upskilling programs to these under connected populations.

## 1. **Accessibility.**

- a. ***Streamline application processes for benefit access programs.*** It is not enough to create benefit access programs and digital upskilling initiatives; we need to be able to determine if the process is creating barriers to under connected and unconnected communities. Alleviating this burden will require working with stakeholders such as Internet Service Providers to make application processes more simplified and not drawn out. In turn, this will also help the burden placed on digital navigators<sup>18</sup> and community organizations as they assist target populations in need of benefit access.

## 2. **Accountability.**

- a. ***Increase data collection and reinforce the value of metrics.*** ***Reinforcing*** the value of metrics will be crucial to showing what is working in efforts towards digital upskilling and what is not. Current metrics and data sets derived from multiple efforts such as grant recipient reporting, census data and infrastructure mapping, and survey and subscription data will allow for accountability and transparency in digital upskilling. For example, while coverage gaps might be closing, subscription data or infrastructure mapping will allow us to closely

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<sup>17</sup> Benton Institute (2023). Available at: <https://www.benton.org/blog/half-acp-eligible-households-still-unaware-program>. (Date accessed: 5/20/23).

<sup>18</sup> NDIA National Digital Navigator Corps: <https://www.digitalinclusion.org/digital-navigator-model/> (NDIA website).

assess how demographics play a role. We can see where there are low broadband adoption rates and how coverage shows up for different communities.

- b. **Coordinate Data Collection Across Stakeholders.** Having metrics developed by one stakeholder will help hold them accountable, but for digital upskilling efforts and initiatives to become sustainable, a large-scale effort with participation of many stakeholders is required. These metrics must be developed as an ecosystem involving community, academia, industry, civil society, non-governmental organizations, faith-based partners, and various other stakeholders. Through this, it requires getting the voice of everybody and making that part of the metrics. The outcome will be great, deliberative democratic processes that begin from the ground-up, getting the voice of everybody and making that part of the metrics.

### 3. Sustainability.

- a. **Leverage existing educational and community resources.** It is important to take advantage of all the vast resources that already exist. For example, programs from computer science, information science, library science, and education currently exist and are readily available to be used. The FCC's Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF)<sup>19</sup> showed us how multiple stakeholders can contribute to the sustainability of digital upskilling programs. One great example is that of schools and libraries consolidating bulk purchasing out to their respective communities, as well as providing a digital navigator to help with necessary digital skills. This made it quite easy for localities to push out the resources to the individuals in their community who needed them.
- b. **Diversify funding resources and maintain flexibility.** We have seen the importance of diversifying efforts when it comes to acquiring funding and resources. You should have a flexible, inclusive approach, and this can be done by relying on funding outside of the federal government. There are so many opportunities around state funding as well as

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<sup>19</sup> *FCC Emergency Connectivity Fund*: <https://www.fcc.gov/emergency-connectivity-fund> (Federal Communications Commission website).

grassroot level funding. For example, in Colorado, we saw reliance on state governments when federal funding was no longer available. However, we also saw the creation of Colorado’s Committee on Digital Literacy<sup>20</sup>, with partnerships at the local levels where community-based organizations served as digital navigators at the grassroot level. Sustainability requires diversifying your resources with no co-dependence on one stakeholder.

- c. ***Establish a Network and Build Community Trust.*** Creating community and building out a network can help ensure that programs remain sustainable. There are opportunities to start with small scale projects and expand into bigger communities. For example, we saw programming that expanded to six states that initially solely focused on diabetes prevention just four years ago. Through digital upscaling, there are now six states that not only house diabetes prevention programs, but they also house mental health interventions. There is now engagement in those communities around the Affordable Connectivity Program, assisting individuals with getting enrolled into that program. It is the partnerships and the relationships that are key to achieving sustainability through community networks.

### III. CONCLUSION

In February 2022, FCC Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel announced the formation of a cross-agency task force that would focus on creating rules and policies to combat digital discrimination and to promote equal access to broadband across the country, regardless of zip code, income level, ethnicity, race, religion, or national origin. She stated, “In the very first sentence of the Communications Act<sup>1</sup> Congress directs the FCC to help make communications services available to all the people of the United States without discrimination. We can do this. We need to. It’s about equity opportunity,

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<sup>20</sup> Colorado Committee on Digital Literacy: <https://cdle.colorado.gov/digitalinclusion> (Colorado Department of Labor and Employment website).

making it possible for everyone to have a fair shot at 21st century success. We seek to identify the policies and practices that can lead to digital discrimination, recognizing that this won't be easy. We're going to do it in a thoughtful way."<sup>21</sup>

The digital divide is defined as the gap between those who have affordable access, skills, and support to effectively engage online and those who do not. As technology constantly evolves, the digital divide prevents equal participation and opportunity in all parts of life, disproportionately affecting people of color, Indigenous peoples, households with low incomes, people with disabilities, people in rural areas, and older adults.

In addition, digital skills training for our workforce should be a priority. Not only do digital upskilling programs create a better skilled and more adaptable workforce, but they can also boost employee engagement, performance, and set the employee on a path of lifelong learning.

The work of the I&A Digital Skills Gap Workstream, as demonstrated in this report, has identified barriers, as well as strategies, to close the digital divide for all citizens. Whose job is it, though? It is all our responsibility. It is family helping family, neighbors helping neighbors, friends and coworkers helping each other to learn digital skills so that we can all participate in our ever-changing digital economy.

It is remembering that we cannot leave even one person behind as we navigate our digital world. It is meeting people where they are, and providing whatever support is needed with the utmost dignity and respect. It is about being compassionate and humble. It is about the many individuals and organizations that have been, and will continue, promoting digital equity every day for they are leading the way. They are our unsung heroes.

On behalf of the I&A Digital Skills Gap Workstream, we thank Chairwoman Rosenworcel for the opportunity to dig deep, to be purposeful, and to understand the barriers that many citizens across the United States face every day. We will achieve

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<sup>21</sup> *Rosenworcel Announces Task Force to Prevent Digital Discrimination*, FCC News Release (February 8, 2022) (<https://www.fcc.gov/document/rosenworcel-announces-task-force-prevent-digital-discrimination>).

digital equity and close the digital divide when all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy, and economy. We can, and must, do more.

For more information:

- Link to the video of the *Digital Skills Gap Symposium and Town Hall* hosted by the FCC's Media Bureau and the Communications Equity and Diversity Council (CEDC) September 22, 2022: <https://www.fcc.gov/news-events/events/2022/09/digital-skills-gap-symposium-town-hall>  
OR  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AETbG0Zp2cM>
- Link to the transcript of the *Digital Skills Gap Symposium and Town Hall* hosted by the FCC's Media Bureau and the Communications Equity and Diversity Council (CEDC) September 22, 2022: <https://www.fcc.gov/sites/default/files/cedc-09222022-transcript.pdf>

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## I&A WG #3 Recommendations:

1. Share Report with NTIA and other federal government/agency stakeholders.
2. Create a formalized “National Digital Skills Strategy:”
  - a. Consider re-chartering the CEDC (or a task force/committee) to focus on formalizing this Plan (with a Plan or interim report delivered no later than March 1, 2024). Requesting that I&A group continue the work, and that some of the same members be involved – the outputs would be up to that group - Invite representatives from key agencies, local/state organizations, trade groups, etc. but some recommendations could include:
    - i. Create CEDC taskforce/working group – include representatives from other agencies/organizations;\*
    - ii. Overarching mission follows the recommendations in WS#3 final report;
    - iii. Help create a framework that can be shared;
    - iv. Asset mapping;
    - v. Seek additional comments on a potential National Digital Upskilling Plan as a further notice to the Digital Discrimination NPRM;
    - vi. Aggregate best practices from state equity plans into National Digital Skills Strategy into final recommendations;
    - vii. Determine metrics and measurement recommendations / goals for BEAD and DEA funding; and
    - viii. Ensure that providers are familiar with the Plan, its goals and create ways they can support the overall Digital Upskilling effort.
3. FCC should adopt digital upskilling strategies that are effective in the following areas:
  - a. Meet people where they are & build trust in the community;
  - b. Utilizes traditional media to reach underrepresented groups;
  - c. Overcome systemic barriers & emphasis sustainability through collaboration; and
  - d. Measure outcomes & establish metrics.

## Recommended Focus for the Commission

### Bridging the Digital Divide:

1. Highlight critical importance of trusted partnerships & positive lessons learned from ACP.
  - a. Successes in ACP Outreach could be implemented for digital upskilling.
2. Universal Concepts:
  - a. Meet people where they are & build trust in the community;
  - b. Utilize traditional media to reach underrepresented groups;
  - c. Overcome systemic barriers & emphasize sustainability through collaboration; and
  - d. Measure outcomes & establish metrics.

*\* As an example, in the FCC's Jobs Skills and Training working group of the Broadband Deployment Advisory Committee (BDAC) final report in 2020, they recommended the creation of an interagency committee to address many of the workforce related issues that the working group highlighted. The Telecommunications Interagency Working Group was chartered in January of 2022 with the objective of presenting a recommendations report to Congress, on the state of the Broadband Workforce, by January 2023.*

# IV. APPENDICES

## A. Digital Equity & Digital Inclusion Plan Checklist

To address leveraging the internet, communities can adopt a **Digital Equity and Digital Inclusion Plan**. A plan includes designing intentional strategies and investments to reduce and eliminate historical, institutional, and structural barriers to access and technology use.

The plan should address the four components to Digital Inclusion – Affordable Broadband, Affordable Equipment, Digital Skills Training, and Public Computer Access. To create the plan, it begins by analyzing the community or region’s demographics and reviewing the data to recommend a digital skills plan for the community or region.

The **Digital Equity and Digital Inclusion Plan** will also include what options are available for affordable broadband, affordable equipment and where public computer access may be available in a community or region. Creating a **Digital Equity and Digital Inclusion Plan** includes the following components:

- Assist in Creating a Team to Create and Execute the Digital Equity and Digital Inclusion Plan.
- Demographic Analysis
  - Evaluate Median Household Income, Age & Sex, Educational Attainment, Race & Ethnicity, Poverty, Employment, Housing, as well as broadband adoption data which includes number of households with a computer and with broadband internet subscription.
- Address Affordable Broadband
  - Establish a plan for affordable broadband service for low-income families.
    - Promote and Assist Families in Applying for the FCC’s Affordable Connectivity Program.

- Identify the discounted broadband offered by local Internet Service Providers.
- Address Affordable Equipment
  - Identify the discounted, low-cost computers, laptops, and other devices offered by local and national organizations.
    - Create a plan for distribution of devices, as well as providing technical support.
  - Create a plan for distribution of tablets with cellular connectivity for low-income families without broadband access or equipment.
- Address Public Computer Access
  - Identify where public Wi-Fi is available.
  - Create a plan and budget to install Public Wi-Fi Community Hotspots at targeted, public locations.
- Create a Train-the-Trainer Digital Skills Program
  - Create a plan and budget to train local digital literacy instructors.
  - Create a plan to execute and provide digital skills classes locally via interactive videoconferencing format or in-person classes.
  - Alternatively, partner with an organization that offers fee-for-service classes to residents via interactive videoconferencing.

*\*The Digital Equity & Digital Inclusion Plan checklist was developed from input that the CEDC's Innovation and Access Workstream #3 (Digital Skills Gap Workstream) received from our Fall 2022 Digital Skills Gap Symposium and Town Hall, as well as from working procedures and frameworks utilized in actual community/regional Digital Equity & Digital Inclusion Plans and implementation by WS#3 and CEDC member, the National Digital Equity Center, [www.digitalequitycenter.org](http://www.digitalequitycenter.org).*

## **B. Corporate Digital Equity Summaries**

Following are examples of corporate digital equity / upskilling programs of several organizations with representatives on the CEDC. These programs are not meant to be a complete or exhaustive list of all initiatives in this area either present or past, but a cross section of relevant examples to the I&A Digital Skills Gap Workstream's efforts and this report. Meta, Microsoft and Charter provided responses on their programs and initiatives in response to a series of questions from I&A Working Group #3.

### **1. Meta Digital Literacy and Other Online Resources (Examples)**

Get Digital: Meta's digital citizenship and well-being program provides schools and families with lesson plans and activities to help build the core competencies and skills young people need to safely navigate the digital world. This program centers around 5 pillars: (1) Digital Foundations, (2) Digital Engagement, (3) Digital Empowerment, (4) Digital Wellness and (5) Digital Opportunity. The program includes a range of courses on various elements of digital connection, with dedicated sections for students, parents, and teachers. For more information, click [here](#).

Digital Marketing Skills: This content is designed by educators for educators and can be used to teach digital marketing to students at all levels of higher education, including advanced high school, career, and technical school (CTE) students, as well as students in community college, university and MBA programs. The content in the Educators Portal takes participants through the basics of starting, executing, and measuring a digital campaign on Facebook and Instagram. Students are also challenged to consider online safety and privacy, and how data is shared. For more information, click [here](#).

Meta Boost: A global free program that trains and enables small businesses to get the most out of Meta's products platforms for their businesses. These workshops offer small business owners an opportunity to learn more about how digital tools can be used as a tool for business growth while also making meaningful connections with potential consumers. Whether it is setting up a Facebook page, finding their audience online or creating engaging content, these

free workshops have helped thousands of entrepreneurs develop their social media skills and unlock new audiences. For more information, click [here](#).

SheMeansBusiness: When women do well, economies do well: the #SheMeansBusiness program provides support including digital skills training to thousands of female business owners globally. The program is focused on leveling the playing field by ensuring women equal access to tools and networks that will allow their businesses to thrive. The program also seeks to celebrate and spotlight women who, despite the additional challenges they face, continue to drive their businesses to success. For more information, click [here](#).

Meta for Business: This program provides marketing and advertising skills training courses to help businesses. There are also resources for remote work from home online safety practices targeted towards businesses (launched during COVID-19). Readers can receive a quick recap on how to protect their passwords, set and review log-in alerts, and identify phishing and scams. For more information, please click [here](#).

Meta For Education: Recent events have led many educators to contemplate how to incorporate a racial justice lens with their students to foster a more inclusive and equitable environment. Meta For Education has gathered materials to help educators find and build community, discover anti-racism resources, and learn about other tools to support the start of a new school year during this unprecedented time. For more information, please click [here](#).

## **2. Microsoft Digital Skilling Initiatives Overview**

Microsoft believes that everyone should have access to the skills, technology, and affordable internet they need to succeed in a changing economy. As more communities obtain access to high-speed internet and devices, it has become clear that the lack of digital skills is a significant barrier to broadband adoption and digital transformation in communities. We approach this barrier with a continuum of targeted initiatives aimed to support digital skills for broadband adoption, starting with digital skills for broadband adoption through skilling for the jobs of tomorrow:

### Microsoft Philanthropies:

Microsoft Philanthropies helps bring to life the company's mission with technology, skills, and a focus on jobs to drive sustainable social impact and economic opportunity for all,

creating systemic change by investing in key areas: Digital Inclusion, Digital Transformation, and Community Engagement. Some of Microsoft Philanthropies' impactful digital skilling initiatives drive impact by:

[Helping skill and recruit 250,000 people—especially from underrepresented groups—into the US cybersecurity workforce by 2025](#), including: (1) making curriculum available free of charge to all the nation's public community colleges, (2) providing training for new and existing faculty at 150 community colleges, and (3) providing scholarships and supplemental resources to 25,000 students.

Reaching more than 12,000 students at over 500 high schools in the United States and British Columbia, Canada (2022-2023 school year) with computer science education through our [Technology Education and Learning Support \(TEALS\) program](#). 48% of TEALS students in 2021 identified as Black/African American, Hispanic/Latinx, or Indigenous; 30% identified as female; and nearly one in five schools are in rural communities (2021-2022 school year).

[Helping to train and certify 10 million people from underserved communities](#) with in-demand digital skills for jobs and livelihood opportunities in the digital economy by 2025.

Catalyzing more than \$115 million in additional funding from other organizations and upskilling more than 55,000 job seekers across twelve US regions through [Microsoft TechSpark](#), a program that works to ensure everyone can benefit from the digital economy.

Providing \$3.2 billion (about \$10 per person in the US) in donated and discounted technology (up 29% from last year) to 302,000 nonprofits that deliver critical services to over 1.2 billion people around the world. [Over the next five years, the number of nonprofits reached via this program will double](#) and grants will be provided to help amplify impact.

[Investing \\$7 million with local NGOs in 21 communities and 13 countries that have Microsoft datacenters](#) to enable student training and scholarships, technical support, volunteerism, and environmental projects; and providing \$8 Million in funding in the past two years to help the institutions digitally transform, expand access to learning pathways, and support their local communities.

Enabling transitioning military service members to land jobs in technology through the [Microsoft Software and Systems Academy \(MSSA\)](#). This full-time, 17-week technical training program leads to in-demand careers in cloud development, cloud administration, and related fields. 95% of the MSSA participants graduate from the program and 92% secure employment in technology.

Helping recruit, develop, and upskill unconventional talent for employability into the technology industry worldwide through the [Microsoft Learning Experiential Accelerant Program \(LEAP\)](#). LEAP offers an immersive 16-week experience for those who have a base foundation of technical training. Microsoft LEAP combines in-classroom learning with hands-on engineering projects, working on real teams and real products within our organization such as Azure, Xbox, Bing, and Office365.

Microsoft Airband Initiative:

[The Microsoft Airband Initiative](#) advances high-speed internet access and meaningful connectivity as a fundamental right around the world, driving broadband access and adoption by partnering with local and regional internet and energy access providers, telecom equipment makers and nonprofits, as well as governmental and nongovernmental organizations. In close partnership with Microsoft Philanthropies and our nonprofit partners, Airband addresses the digital skills barrier to broadband adoption by leveraging Microsoft LinkedIn Learning courses and Microsoft Skills for Jobs curricula to provide training for people of all ages to ensure they have the confidence to navigate the internet and improve their access to education, learn new skills, and obtain employment. This includes supporting community-based networks of digital navigators by ensuring they are equipped with adequate resources and curriculum to drive broadband adoption in their communities. Some of Airband's impactful partnerships include:

Rural LISC – Airband partner [Rural LISC](#) employs a digital navigator program curriculum focusing on foundational digital literacy and internet access. Rural LISC emphasizes Microsoft LinkedIn Learning courses and Microsoft Skills for Jobs curricula to supplement their existing portfolio of high-impact resources, which includes Literacy Minnesota's Northstar Digital Literacy client-progression tracking administrative portal, online safety training, and an Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) enrollment training module. Airband and Rural LISC are committed to building a strong and sustainable foundation to enable digital navigators to help members of their communities leverage digital skilling content and training to transform their lives.

EveryoneOn – Airband partner [EveryoneOn](#) helps unlock social and economic opportunity by connecting people in under-resourced communities to affordable internet service and computers and providing digital skills trainings. EveryoneOn utilizes several tools to ensure the communities they serve have access to robust digital skilling resources, including their [Digital Learning Center](#), which facilitates access to free online resources that cover computer and internet basics, education, health, employment and financial literacy. The resources are provided by external organizations and include Microsoft LinkedIn Learning courses and Microsoft Skills for Jobs curricula.

4-H Tech Changemakers – Under the auspices of [Growing Home](#), the umbrella corporate social responsibility program that is part of Microsoft’s efforts to expand opportunity in rural America, Airband partners with the National 4-H Council on their [Tech Changemakers](#) initiative to empower youth to help close the broadband gap, working to ensure that people feel secure and knowledgeable enough to adopt and use technology. Through the 4-H Tech Changemakers initiative, Microsoft is helping to equip young people with the knowledge, resources, and empowerment to help members of their local communities overcome barriers to broadband adoption and empower them to transform their lives through technology. Additionally, the 4-H Tech Changemakers coalition provides a model for communities to implement their own youth-led digital navigator program, offering a guidebook with best practices and guidelines for youth/adult partnerships to plan, implement and evaluate a Tech Changemakers program.

PCs for People – [PCs for People](#) is a nonprofit device refurbisher and Internet Service Provider focused on getting low-cost computers, affordable broadband internet, and digital skilling resources into the homes of low-income individuals, driving impact in the areas of digital inclusion and environmental sustainability. As part of its partnership with Airband, PCs for People provides access to digital skilling content and technology support via its Digital Education Call Center, a dedicated toll-free hotline that enables customers of Airband rural internet service providers and subscribers within PCs for People’s footprint easy access to digital skilling resources and support. PCs for People also offers free, in-person digital skills training through classes and workshops to eligible customers in certain markets, and virtually across the country.

gener8tor Skills Accelerators – Microsoft TechSpark and Airband leverage the [gener8tor Skills Accelerator](#) program, which works closely with community nonprofits (libraries, workforce development boards, homeless shelters, food pantries and others) from around the country to help unemployed and underemployed individuals learn new digital skills, receive coaching and mentorship, and land new living wage jobs. This program leverages the Microsoft Skills for Jobs Initiative and free LinkedIn Learning.

#### Microsoft TechSpark:

Rapid advances in technology are creating new opportunities, but for many, they remain out of reach. [Microsoft TechSpark](#) partners locally to ensure everyone can benefit from the digital economy through our tools and resources. TechSpark promotes digital skills and employability by helping to close the skills gap and prepare employers to hire and support employees in the changing workforce in new ways. As noted above, TechSpark has catalyzed over \$70 million in additional funding from other organizations and upskilled over 15,000 job seekers across eight US regions. Over the last 5 years, TechSpark has invested in place-based programming across the United States, often along with other Microsoft initiatives:

Community Skills Initiative (CSI) – The [Community Skills Initiative](#), supported by TechSpark and Microsoft Growing Home, provides free training and resources to help anyone get the in-demand skills they need, allowing participants to upskill at their own pace, in English or Spanish. Additionally, in 11 rural communities around the United States, 4-to-8 week digital skills competitions are held, paying competitors earning the most certifications (See [UpSkill-A-Thon | NCW Tech Alliance \(communityskilling.org\)](#)). This program leverages Microsoft Skills for Jobs Initiative and free LinkedIn Learning.

[gener8tor Skills Accelerators](#) – As noted above, Microsoft TechSpark and Airband leverage the gener8tor program to help unemployed and underemployed individuals learn new digital skills, receive coaching and mentorship, and land new living wage jobs, utilizing the Microsoft Skills for Jobs Initiative and free LinkedIn Learning. 1,390 participants have utilized this program to date, with a 79% graduation rate and a 71% job placement rate. Participants have earned 4,261 LinkedIn Learning certificates across the 425-company network, with a \$54,000 average annual salary totaling \$30.83 Million in annual economic impact.

The Northeast Wisconsin Manufacturing Alliance – The [Northeast Wisconsin Manufacturing Alliance](#) Employee Upskilling program provides skilling for manufacturing employees in Data Analytics and Project Management. The local Technical College is offering advanced Microsoft Power BI classes for those interested in furthering their learning. This program has leveraged Microsoft Skills for Jobs Initiative to drive digital transformation by training 679 employees across 80 companies.

The [Bridge Accelerator](#) program is a binational supplier development program supported by Microsoft Tech Spark and designed for small to medium-sized supplier companies in Paso del Norte region located at the United States-Mexico Border in El Paso, Texas and Juarez, Mexico. Technology Hub, the first innovation and business center in Juarez, designed The Bridge Accelerator program, in alliance with Microsoft and Pioneers 21. To date this program has led to the creation of over 300 new jobs in the region, leading to \$29 Million in sales for participants and over \$1 Million in new investments.

### **3. Charter Communications Digital Upskilling/Equity and Diversity & Inclusion Initiatives**

#### **Background**

Charter Communications is a leading connectivity company and cable operator providing superior broadband, voice, video, and mobile services under the brand name Spectrum

to more than 32 million customers across 41 states. We offer high-quality service provided by U.S.-based, insourced employees.

In 2018, we entered the marketplace with Wi-Fi service that today supports 41M wireless devices and 80% of wireless traffic on our consumers' mobile devices. Our high-value Spectrum pricing and packaging structure, includes Spectrum Mobile™, Spectrum TV, and Spectrum Voice offerings.

We are driving innovation and growing economies from coast to coast and in communities big and small. Charter has invested nearly \$40 billion over a 4-year period in our network infrastructure and new technology to build out our network in both urban and rural areas.

Spectrum Enterprise, a part of Charter Communications, Inc., is a national provider of scalable, fiber technology solutions serving America's largest businesses and communications service providers. The broad Spectrum Enterprise portfolio includes networking and managed services solutions: Internet access, Ethernet access and networks, voice and TV solutions.

Spectrum Networks is the local programming division of Charter, consisting of over 30 dedicated hyperlocal 24/7 news networks and regional sports networks from coast to coast.

Our Diversity & Inclusion team works across the organization along with our partners and the community to help the company reach its full potential, incorporating diversity and inclusion into everything that we do.

Our External Diversity and Inclusion Council (EDIC) is comprised of national civic and business leaders who help us understand the critical needs of the diverse communities we serve and how to implement our programs to make a positive impact. Our EDIC includes organizations such as The National Urban League, National Organization on Disability, UnidosUS, National Urban Indian Family Coalition, OCA – Asian Pacific American Advocates and Multicultural Media, Telecom and Internet Council, among others. We also partner with these organizations on programs to address important issues including workforce development, education and digital inclusion.

## **1. Community Partnerships**

Our Community Impact function, focused on strategic philanthropic investments and programs within the company's 41-state footprint. It includes several signature philanthropic and engagement programs: Spectrum Community Assist, Spectrum

Digital Education, Spectrum Employee Community Grants, Spectrum Scholars and Spectrum Community Investment Loan Fund.

### **Spectrum Digital Education Grants**

To increase adoption and access to technology, Charter offers philanthropic support to community organizations, including through its Spectrum Digital Education Grant program, which provides computers, digital education classes, and technology labs for thousands across the country.

- Charter has committed \$8 million over the past six years to fund the Spectrum Digital Education Grant Program recognizing that education and digital literacy are as important as affordability relative to a household's lack of broadband service, and to date has funded 146 nonprofit organizations, supporting more than 100,000 people in 22 states and Washington, D.C.

Organizations are selected on the basis of their efforts to educate community members on the benefits of broadband in financially underserved rural and urban areas within the company's 41-state footprint. They have used the funding to provide computers to those without digital access and digital literacy training for older adults. Funding also has been used to help expand nonprofits' online programs, purchase software to make technology more accessible for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and to combat isolation amongst senior citizens.

Among the nonprofits awarded Spectrum Digital Education grants this year are The Oasis Institute in St. Louis, which offers resources and strategies to help older adults navigate digital technology; Whitmore Economic Development Group, a computer training center for agricultural workers in Hawaii; US Together Inc., which provides digital education to refugees from Afghanistan, Ukraine and the Congo in Northeast Ohio; the LGBT Technology Institute, a Staunton, VA-based initiative to ensure connectivity for disadvantaged LGBTQ+ individuals; Latinitas, a bilingual program for adults looking to improve their technology skills in Austin, TX; and InterFaith Works of Central New York, which helps urban and rural seniors improve their digital skills.

### **Spectrum Community Center Assist**

Charter launched Spectrum Community Center Assist ("SCCA") in 2021. SCCA is a \$30 million philanthropic initiative to revitalize local community centers and invest in job training programs in underserved rural and urban communities across our 41-state footprint. Our goal is to improve 100 community centers, impacting an estimated 50,000 local residents. Since launching the program, we have invested over \$3.1 million in 25 community centers, enabling the centers to enhance their job skills training programs and outreach to support

local communities. Nearly 7,500 community members have been served by the centers since the program launched.

Our accomplishments to date are the result of partnering with national and local nonprofit organizations to identify and improve community centers. We invest in the centers' job training efforts with cash grants and in-kind contributions and improve classroom spaces through renovations and the provision of technology and equipment to enhance participants' learning experience, including laptops, smartboards, and furniture. Revitalization events with employee and community volunteers are held at each center. Additionally, because broadband is a critical component of a community center's infrastructure, we provide each community center with advanced 1 gigabit per second ("Gbps") Internet service.

For example, Charter launched SCCA in Missoula, Montana with Opportunity Resources Inc., a nonprofit organization that partners with 75 businesses to provide people with disabilities opportunities to obtain meaningful employment. In addition to financial assistance, Charter's upgrades to its facility included the new Spectrum Training and Technology Center, which enabled Opportunity Resources Inc. to enhance its operations and training programs focused on fields such as construction cleanup, manufacturing production and general woodworking. "We greatly appreciate support from the Spectrum Community Center Assist program. The new computers and office equipment will help us to improve staff training, which will result in quality outcomes for the people we serve," said Kurtis Mayne, Director of Vocational Services for Opportunity Resources, Inc. "In addition, the financial support will allow Opportunity Resources, Inc. to further pursue competitive and integrated employment opportunities, specifically helping people with different abilities find meaningful employment in our community."

## **2) Workforce Development and Initiatives**

At Charter, our employees are our greatest resource – and investing in their continued education and growth helps us better serve our customers and build stronger connections in the communities we serve.

At Charter, we strive to deliver high-quality products and services that exceed our customers' expectations and embrace the unique perspectives and experiences of our employees and partners and the communities we serve.

Across the company, Charter is enhancing diversity and inclusion practices. Currently, 50 percent of Charter employees identify as a person of color, 33 percent are women and nearly ten percent have a military affiliation. Our 96,000+ employees earn at least \$20 per hour – nearly three times the federal minimum wage. And our hourly workforce also earns robust benefits like paid time off, including sick leave, and company-paid retirement.

Charter is continually working to expand our recruiting, training, and hiring efforts across our footprint—at military bases and through our partnerships with proven programs. One example is the Hiring Our Heroes (HOH) initiative through the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation. Hiring Our Heroes is a nationwide effort to connect veterans, service members, and military spouses with meaningful employment opportunities.

### **Broadband Field Technician Apprenticeship Program**

Our Broadband Technician Apprenticeship Program is one of our promising strategies for building our skilled workforce. The program was developed to attract, train, and retain a highly skilled, diverse, and locally based workforce. To meet our business objectives of providing superior products with great customer service, Charter obtained a certification for its Broadband Field Technician Apprenticeship Program from the Department of Labor (DOL). Upon receiving certification from the DOL, Charter was able to expand their training program from an initial five states to all 41 states where it provides service.

Charter's Broadband Field Technician Apprenticeship program is aligned with our broadband technician career progression and includes thousands of hours of on-the-job training along with classroom instruction. When enrolled employees complete the program, they are certified broadband technicians.

Training is focused on customer service, safety, and skills required to perform installations and service calls. The Broadband Field Technician Apprenticeship Program is a self-progression program, which allows employees to make decisions about their chosen careers and gain in-depth knowledge about their jobs and industries.

Individuals can participate in this program at no cost to them and a college degree is not required. Throughout their participation in the apprenticeship program, Charter employees earn at least \$20 per hour along with generous benefits, including medical, education and training, relocation, and retirement. Veterans who are eligible can also receive GI Bill benefits during the program, while simultaneously earning paychecks from Charter. This allows for a smooth transition into civilian life. Upon completion of this three-year program, graduates receive an industry-recognized broadband field technician certification from the USDOL.

To recruit veterans into the program, Charter has established partnerships with more than 20 military bases as well as with organizations that focus on helping members of the military community transition to the civilian job market, like *Hiring our Heroes*, the U.S. Department of Defense *Military Spouse Employment Partnership*, *Paralyzed Veterans of America*, and the *Wounded Warrior Project*.

## C. CEDC Innovation and Access Workstream #3 (Digital Skills Gap) Member Bios

**Matthew Bauer**, Vice President, Connected Communities  
Wireless Research Center (WRC)  
Lead I&A Digital Skills Gap Workstream

Matthew's career arc follows a consistent theme: helping start, build, and grow organizations while leveraging business and telecom as a positive force for people and the planet. He started his career with the House Telecom & Finance Subcommittee in the mid 80s and went on to co-found 3 companies and 1 nonprofit, including one of the first telcos (BetterWorld Technology) focused on social and environmental impact and a founding B Corp company. Matthew is a member of the FCC Communications Equity and Diversity Council, the Colorado Digital Equity Working Group and leads Connected Communities @ WRC (<https://www.wrc-us.org/>), with a mission to bring digital workforce development via DigitalBridge Hubs, entrepreneurship, and advanced technologies to rural and underserved communities nationwide.

**Edgar Class**, Partner  
Wiley Rein LLP  
Representing Hispanic National Bar Association

Edgar has extensive experience representing U.S. and multinational companies on regulatory and transactional matters involving telecommunications services. His experience includes representation before the Federal Communications Commission, Congress, and the Administration. Edgar is a past president of the Hispanic Bar Association of the District of Columbia and serves as chair of the firm's Latinx Lawyers Affinity Group.

**Susan Corbett**, Founder  
National Digital Equity Center

Ms. Corbett is a preeminent authority and advocate for digital equity and digital inclusion and works closely with economic development and rural organizations to promote broadband adoption. In the fall of 2017, Ms. Corbett founded and launched the **National Digital Equity Center**, collaborating with local and global change makers, relentlessly driving disruptive strategies to close the digital divide in Maine and across the United States. Ms. Corbett is the Executive Director of the National Digital Equity Center.

Ms. Corbett is the former Chief Executive Officer of **Axiom Technologies**, a provider and advocate of fast, affordable, and reliable broadband services for rural communities. In 2005, Ms. Corbett joined Axiom Technologies as Chief Financial Officer. Under her leadership, the

telecommunications company designed and constructed more than 100 access points connecting more than 2,500 square miles in one of America's roughest terrains — rural Maine. She has written and managed numerous grants for broadband development and adoption.

Ms. Corbett is a public speaker, educator, and advocate who provides broadband access, digital equity and digital inclusion to rural communities everywhere.

**Monica Desai**, Vice President, Global Head of the Connectivity & Access Policy  
Meta

Monica is Vice President, Global Head of the Connectivity & Access Policy group at Meta, where she leads on policy issues involving infrastructure, spectrum, accessibility, online messaging, and net neutrality. Prior to joining Meta, she spent over a decade in senior positions at the Federal Communications Commission, including service as Chief of the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, which develops all policies and rules in connection with consumer-facing issues; Chief of the FCC's Media Bureau, which has oversight over broadcasters and cable companies; Deputy Chief of the Wireless Bureau, where she focused on spectrum issues and infrastructure deployment; and legal advisor to an FCC Commissioner where her portfolio focused on spectrum and international issues. She was previously a partner at the law firm of Squire Patton Boggs, where her practice included counseling clients on a range of policy advocacy and compliance issues. Monica received her JD, *cum laude*, from Georgetown University Law Center, and her BBA in Finance, *magna cum laude*, from the George Washington University. She studied Economics at the American College of Switzerland.

**Sherman Kizart**, Managing Director and Founder  
Kizart Media Partners

Sherman K. Kizart is founder and managing director of Kizart Media Partners, Inc. (KMP, Inc.). The company he launched in 2008 is a national media sales and marketing consulting firm headquartered in Chicago, Illinois that partners with clients to generate greater sales that focus on revenue opportunities for Urban targeted media platforms.

Kizart has acquired his expert knowledge from over 30 years of experience as a marketing specialist. He is one of the leading advocates and authorities in the U.S. on Urban Radio and multicultural media strategies and tactics. Prior to founding KMP, Inc., Kizart worked for Interep, Inc. as senior vice president and director of urban radio. He is recognized for his experience in the media and telecom industry. He was appointed to serve on the FCC's Federal Advisory Committee on Diversity in the Digital Age (FCC) by the last 3 FCC Chairman in both Democratic and Republican Administrations.

**Leticia Latino-Van Splunteren, CEO**

Neptuno USA

With over 25 years of experience in the Telecom Industry Leticia Latino went from working for Merrill Lynch and Telecom Giant Nortel Networks to accepting the challenge of extending the legacy of establishing her family business in the US back in 2002. Neptuno Group was originally founded by her father in 1972 in South America where they helped deploy some of the first Cellular Networks in the region and where they have built over 10,000 Towers.

Leticia is a recipient of several industry recognition awards such as ‘Revolutionary CEO’, “Smart Disruptor” and has been named as one of the 30 most influential Leaders in Tech. She serves as an FCC Appointed member of the Telecommunications Interagency Working Group and on the Innovation and Access Working Group of the of the FCC’s Equity and Diversity Committee. She chaired the FCC’s Broadband Development Advisory Committee Jobs Skills and Training Working Group during the 2018- 2020 term.

In addition, Leticia is a published author, public speaker, mentor to young women and a big advocate of nurturing “Human Connections” through her Back2Basics Podcast. [www.leticialatino.com](http://www.leticialatino.com)

**Eve Lewis, Assistant City Attorney**

City of Coconut Creek, Florida

Eve M. Lewis is a south Florida native with a passion for the safety and sustainability. Eve graduated from the University of Florida where she received a Bachelor of Science from the College of Journalism (Telecommunications) and a Bachelor of Arts (Political Science), as a dual major. Then she earned her Juris Doctorate, graduating cum laude, from Nova Southeastern University’s Shepard Broad Law Center. Currently, Eve works for the City of Coconut Creek, Florida, as an Assistant City Attorney. Eve is a Florida Bar Board Certified Expert in City, County, and Local Government Law. She’s been practicing for more than a decade providing legal counsel on various areas of the law, including but not limited to criminal justice, public governance, business transactions, procurement, environmental conservation, land planning, employment, construction, ethics, regulatory licensing, public utilities and franchises, and information technology.

In the past and present, Eve continues to serve and advance the public welfare through initiatives at every level: federal, state, and local. In 2019, Eve was appointed by the Federal Communications Commission (“FCC”) to serve a two (2) year term on the Broadband Deployment Advisory Committee, and currently serves on the Innovation and Access Working Group of the FCC’s Communications Equity and Diversity Council. Before working in local government, Eve worked as an Assistant State Attorney prosecuting criminal cases involving habitual felony offenders, career criminals, and habitual violent criminals. In her spare time,

Eve serves as the chairperson of an advisory board overseeing a local park near where she lives in the City of Pompano Beach, Florida. Eve has an insatiable thirst for learning and strives to enrich the community at every opportunity. She has a loving husband and two beautiful daughters who inspire and support her in achieving her goals.

**Dr. Dianne Lynch**, President  
Stephens College

Dr. Dianne Lynch became the 24th president of Stephens College in June 2009. Dr. Lynch earned her bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in mass communication and feminist history, and her Ph.D. in Art History and Communications from McGill University in Montreal, Canada. Her research focuses on the social identity development of digital natives – children growing up in online environments.

Dr. Lynch was the 2019 recipient of the Mid-Missouri NAACP Distinguished Service Award, and in 2022 was the recipient of the Delta Sigma Theta Service Award. She was selected as among the 50 Missouri Top Influencers by the *Kansas City Star*, and In 2017 she was named by the *Columbia Business Times* as one of the ten most influential women in Columbia, Missouri. In 2016, she was the recipient of the Athena Leadership Award, annually presented for outstanding leadership and community service.

**Alicia Tambe**, Head of International Organizations for Connectivity & Inclusion  
Meta  
Alternate Representative for Meta

Alicia Tambe is Head of International Organizations for Connectivity & Inclusion at Meta. In her role, she leads Meta's connectivity efforts with international organizations across the globe to advance digital inclusion and affordable and reliable internet access initiatives. She works with policymakers, industry, and other stakeholders to develop strategies for ICTs as a tool for development. Prior to joining Meta, Alicia was Regulatory Counsel at SES, where she worked on global satellite and connectivity regulatory issues, and she has served as Counsel and Regional Specialist for Africa in the International Bureau of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Alicia has also served as Law Clerk in the Office of the White House Counsel as well as Law Clerk to the Deputy Chief of Staff at the Office of the United States Trade Representative. Alicia is a licensed attorney who holds a Juris Doctor from Northeastern University School of Law, a Master of Arts in Sustainable International Development from the Heller School of Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University, and a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the State University of New York at Albany.

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